

Department of Treasury and Finance: budget papers 2018-19

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (17:29:56) — Today in the reports section I wish to deal with the state budget 2018–19. I am particularly interested in a number of areas that the state government is very active in at the moment. We have a very, very left-wing state government. It is a nasty government, it is a harsh government and it is very much focused on attacking private businesses and those who have invested capital. We have seen what Daniel Andrews and his government have done to the taxi industry, destroying the value of licences on one day in October last year. Those who had invested and perhaps purchased licences at government behest in a regulated industry actually had the value of those licences destroyed in a single day. Anyone can now buy a taxi licence for \$52.90.

The truth of course is that the government have continued this extraordinary attack on hardworking small business people and private families. They have now moved on to the bus industry. You can see that bus patronage can be improved, and we all are in favour of seeing value for taxpayers and in favour of seeing improved bus services both in the country and in the very big, growing city of Melbourne. What we are not interested in is seeing a nasty vendetta by Labor and the minister in particular as they attack private bus service operators across the state.

We have seen in metropolitan Melbourne the approach that is adopted. The minister gave assurances. She said that indeed there was no plan to nationalise bus operations, but of course now we know there is. We have seen the contracts. We have seen the arrangements that actually lay out in black and white what Daniel Andrews and his minister propose to do to the bus industry. Longstanding family bus businesses are being forced to confront a very difficult decision: either go out of business in the next few months or sign the contract. That means that your assets — the buses you own, the intellectual property, the depot that the bus line owns — are all to be transferred to the government or their nominee at a future point. Is it in five years

time or six or seven? Whichever, you sign the contract and you are actually signing away the assets of private bus companies, some of which have been in family operation for 50, 60 or 70 years, with assets built up.

A lot of the private bus families just say, ‘Actually, our business is not for sale. We have no desire to sell our business. We don’t want to sell our business. We want to keep operating our bus services and doing so in a way that supports and adds value for our local community’. I have spoken to many of the bus operators, both in the country and in metropolitan Melbourne. They are very prepared to negotiate. They are very prepared to work with local communities. They are very prepared to work with the government of the day to deliver better bus services and good value bus services. What they are not prepared to do is have their assets nationalised.

This is like a blast to the past. Some remember the old Melbourne & Metropolitan Tramways Board. This is like a blast back further; it is back into ancient history. It is the nationalisation agenda, taking private businesses and nationalising them for some ideological, extreme purpose. Goodness gracious, what is going on here? Daniel Andrews and his harsh left-wing government are actually seeking to nationalise the assets of private family bus companies.

The minister has said that this will not apply in this country. Well, nobody believes that for a moment. If they are successful in nationalising the private bus companies in metropolitan Melbourne this year and the Andrews government are re-elected, they will no doubt move on to the country bus contracts in the year following. Nobody should be under any illusions, and I do not think anyone is. Nobody believes that in delivering that service output for buses, which is funded by public money, the government ought to be doing other than negotiating a good quality deal, a sensible deal, with private bus companies. They ought to not be seeking to nationalise a whole industry in this way. It is truly a bizarre step that they are taking.

Who believes for one moment that long term the community will get better value out of having a government-run, nationalised bus service, the Andrews Bus Line? I see that that is exactly where they are headed. The community are unhappy and the bus companies are saying no, and they are standing up and fighting. And they should be.